

- Report No. 76
- January-February 1988

Our God-talk: Images, Idols, Metaphors and Masks



During my college days I read a small book entitled *Your God is Too Small* by J. B. Phillips. The author urges his readers to discover a God "big" enough to meet the challenges and questions of the real world. Phillips was convinced that many people carry inadequate conceptions of God, images that are not only irrelevant to their lives, but that also prevent them from glimpsing the true God.

When we ask questions about the picture of God that informs our life we are probing to the heart of our Christian faith. No wonder that the recent discussion in feminist and liberation theology about inclusive God-images has spawned so much reaction and response. As at so many times in the history of God's people we are asked to look again at our God-images and answer that basic question: Who is our God?

With this issue of *Women's Concerns Report* we want to open the discussion about the language that we use to name and characterize God. By using the words "idols" and "masks" in our title we are acknowledging the risk and danger involved in any imaging of God. At the same time we want to express our relationship to God in words that honestly communicate our personal experience: "images" and "metaphors" are necessary for us to do this.

In my readings and reflections on this theme over the past months several key ideas emerged again and again:

1. *All language about God is limited and inadequate to describe God.*

The Hebrew people, well aware that God was beyond speech, were reluctant to speak God's name. Stories,

metaphors, and various substitute names were used instead of the name YHWH to describe their relationship with God and still preserve the sense of holiness and transcendence. God could be characterized as the God of war as well as the God of peace, the God who never changes and the God who repents. They sang praises to God as the stable rock of our salvation as well as extolled the dynamic vitality of God as a spring of living water. Jesus was both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb that was slain.

The paradoxes and contradictions in the biblical picture of God push us beyond easy creeds and images fixed in stone to dynamic, fluid images which more fully encompass the ways God relates to us.

Traditional Mennonite theology and worship faces a particular problem in this regard. In its fear of idolatry and in its reaction to the elaborate and symbolic worship of the high church traditions, it has rejected the use of physical imagery such as sculpture, painting and architecture. Instead it has stressed the simple, straightforward, literal language about God. But in this literalness, the distance between image and reality is sometimes forgotten. The ability of metaphoric and symbolic speech to communicate truth is not understood. By using only one or two words and images for God it easily can be assumed that God already is known fully by us. Our view of God becomes static and narrow.

We need to learn again that at the root of our inability to speak adequately about God lies God's transcendence and mystery. An emphasis on neglected biblical images can raise our consciousness to see how we have limited God. Creative efforts to express our relationship to God make us aware of how dependent we are on the thought patterns of our particular culture. Yet all our stumbling and awkward attempts to describe God can only testify to a God who continues to resist our attempts at classification, one who even now says to us "I am who I am." (Exodus 3:14)

2. *Our basic picture of God is formed very early in life in a complex interaction between a conscious and unconscious response to life's experiences as well as to the formal teaching we receive.*

This week as I sorted old papers while spring cleaning I discovered a picture drawn by my daughter at the age of 5. Entitled "My Family," it showed mom, dad and brothers in rather typical fashion for a child of that age. What caught my eye was the picture of a similar, much larger person

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The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns *REPORT* USPS 367-790 is published bimonthly jointly by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Peace Section, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501 and by MCC Canada Peace and Social Concerns, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. Second-class postage paid at Akron, PA.

hovering over the others with arms outstretched. For Kristen this person was as real as the others. She named that person God.



Psychology is teaching us that how we experience ourselves in relationship to God is related to how we experience ourselves in relationship to the world and to other people. Sandra Schneiders in her book about women's spirituality and the gender of God, *Women and The Word* (York: Paulist Press 1986), points out that just as our self-concept may be healthy or unhealthy so too our God-image may be unhealthy and need healing.

The therapy needed is not just a rational reconception of God but a "therapy of the religious imagination". Story, poetry, art and music appeal to our emotions and can reach the unconscious level of our beings. An integrated approach involving intellect, will and feeling can bring healing to incomplete God-images. It is important therefore to bring our subconscious image to the surface so that we can allow God to cleanse and redeem that part of ourselves. We must expect our images to change and grow as we relate more deeply to God.

3. *The truth of our words about God must be tested by the way we use the words in actual situations.*

In a recent discussion with a woman who was rejected as a ministry candidate expressly because she was a woman, I was struck by the pain in her voice as she said, "I feel like the God who called me into service is a very different God from the God of the ministerial committee."

The decision had been justified by appeal to a God who determines persons of one sex to be leaders and those of another sex to be obedient followers. It made me realize again how the metaphors and images we use for God can be used either to bring salvific experiences for persons or be used to defend situations of oppression.

It is no surprise that the people who are calling for a new look at our God-imagery are persons who have been oppressed by Christian people and nations. Black people are rejecting a white god who condones slavery and apartheid. South American people are resisting obedience to a North American god who allows exploitation of the poor. Women are questioning a male god who calls forth structures that deny full personhood to women and justify patriarchal power of men over women.

Jesus' words, "You shall know them by their fruits," (Matthew 7:16) can be a guide to testing our God-images. What actions, feelings and commitments do our images call forth? Legitimizing unjust social orders as God's will brings into question whether we have adequately understood God.

This issue of *Report* has two parts. The first challenges us to risk God-talk that moves us beyond names that have become idols that mask or limit God. It calls us instead to explore metaphors that enrich, deepen and challenge us in our worship and in our actions. In this first section:

—Esther Epp-Tiessen recovers for us some of the neglected feminine imagery of the Bible.

—Bev Suderman reflects on some painful personal experiences in church institutions that have helped render feminine God-images meaningful to her.

—Rich Meyer relates how his friends in Lesotho opened him to a God who is more than an idol of white, male culture.

The second section of this issue explores the pain and promise involved when a community attempts to change its God-talk. Following my essay on this theme:

"Language is important to me because my own experience teaches me that unconscious mind imagery affects human life either positively or negatively."
—Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

"In some mysterious, wonderful way, God's nature embraces all those traits we would consider masculine and feminine, and God transcends both. Yet frequent use of the word 'Father,' along with masculine pronouns, cannot help but reinforce an understanding of God as a man. We forget that 'Father' is a metaphor."

—A Mennonite pastor relates how and why he introduced inclusive language into his congregation—and the reactions that ensued.

—A member of this same congregation touches on the personal and collective pain engendered by the change process.

—A songwriter shares how her gifts give her the awesome responsibility to present the truth about God in lyrics and words that become part of "that profound emotional force that is music."—*Lydia Harder*

Lydia Harder has been active in education in the local church as well as in the university setting. She recently began doctoral studies in theology at the Toronto School of Theology.

by Esther Epp-Tiessen

Recovering the Bible's Feminine Imagery

Twelve years ago, while I was in university, I went through a personal and spiritual crisis. I went to talk to my religion professor. I told him that God seemed far away, that I was not at all sure that God knew me and loved and cared for me. My professor listened to me thoughtfully and then asked, "Does it help you to think of God as your heavenly mother?"

I had never thought in such terms before and was quite taken aback at what seemed like a heretical statement. But in subsequent years I have pondered much over that question. And now I can answer, yes, I have found it helpful to conceive of God as mother. By so doing, I have been

able to acknowledge a God who knows me intimately, loves me and walks with me.

I think this has been the case primarily because of my own family situation. My father was a good father. But like many fathers, he was away from home much of the time. And when at home his work kept him so busy that he often seemed distant and remote. My mother was the one who knew my friends, knew my fears and worries, knew about any difficulties I was experiencing at school. Largely because of this family dynamic, the concept of God as mother became meaningful to me.

We have grown accustomed to calling God our father. "Father" has become a familiar, comfortable way of addressing God. Yet when Jesus encouraged his listeners to call God their father, it was a revolutionary new title, representing a radical break from Jewish tradition. Jesus' intent was to convey the idea that one's relationship with God is characterized by deep intimacy, confidence and trust. In fact, the Aramaic word "Abbe" that Jesus used was a common, homey, everyday kind of word that would probably more accurately be translated as "Dad:" or even "Daddy."

Jesus' use of the word "father" scandalized many of his listeners who believed that such familiarity with God was blasphemous. The word "Abbe" probably prompted a similar kind of reaction to that elicited by the word "Mother" today. Yet this kind of familiarity was exactly what Jesus wanted to demonstrate—that we can relate to God as a child relates to a parent.

"Father God" is a beautiful image or metaphor. The problem is that it has, in the minds of many, made us think of God as a man. On one level, we know that God is not a man. In Genesis 1 we read that God created both male and female in God's image. In some mysterious, wonderful way, God's nature embraces all those traits we would consider masculine and feminine, and God transcends both. Yet frequent use of the word "Father," along with masculine pronouns, cannot help but reinforce an understanding of God as a man. We forget that "Father" is a metaphor.

There is nothing wrong with our use of the word "Father" to describe God. Where we err is in ignoring other images—images which can provide balance. While both the Old Testament and the New refer to God predominantly in masculine terms, to do justice to the biblical imagery about God, we need to take note of the significant number of passages where God is spoken of in feminine terms.

"Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops
of dew?
From whose womb did the ice
come forth,
and who has given birth to the
hoarfrost of heaven?"
—Job 38:28-29

"But I have calmed and quieted
my soul,
like a child quieted at its
mother's breast;
like a child that is quieted is my
soul.
—Psalm 131:2

In Numbers 11, the Israelites begin to grow weary and to complain as they journey in the wilderness. They look longingly back to their Egyptian captivity and the good food they had. The Lord's anger blazed and Moses responds in their defense, "Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that thou shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child...?'"

Moses' words suggests that God is like the mother of these people. The relationship of God to Israel is like a woman who conceives, gives birth to and nourishes the newborn infant Israel. This is clearly a feminine image.

In Deuteronomy 32, Moses again uses feminine imagery to speak of God. He says to the people, who have once again strayed from worship of God to worship of idols, "You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you and you forgot the God who gave you birth."

God is described as a midwife in Psalm 22: "Thou art he who took me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts." This is an image of God as a midwife who assists in the delivery of a child, who catches the newborn as it emerges from its mother's body and immediately places it on her stomach. Despite the pronoun "he," the image again is definitely a feminine one.

Isaiah 42, the description of God's new creation, provides another example. God will give birth to this new creation as a woman gives birth to a child: "Now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant."

My favorite Old Testament example of feminine imagery for God comes from Isaiah 49. The people of Israel are in despair, claiming that God has forsaken them. God's response is, "Can a woman forget a sucking baby that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?" The prophet uses perhaps the supreme expression of human love—a mother's love for her child—to describe God's love for Israel.

Some Old Testament scholars have pointed out that the Hebrew word for womb, *rehem*, is also one of the words for "to love," "to show mercy," "to show compassion." Thus, even when the biblical reference does not explicitly describe God as a woman, there is that feminine element present.

In the New Testament, we can find feminine images of God as well. In Luke, to give just one example, Jesus tells his disciples that God is like a woman who, having lost a coin, will search diligently throughout the house until she finds it.

Thus, even though masculine images of God predominate in the Bible, there are significant passages where God is described in feminine terms. Given that the Bible was written by men, and that it arose out of a patriarchal society where women clearly held a secondary position—where men in fact gave thanks to God that they were not created slaves, Gentiles or women—the existence of these passages is truly remarkable.

One reason, therefore, why we need to broaden our imagery of God to include God as mother is to emphasize elements of the biblical tradition. A second reason is that



when we use one metaphor of God to the exclusion of others, we limit our understanding of who God is. In a sense, we make God in our own image. It is essential that we not confuse our human concepts of God with absolute truth. As Paul says, "Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully." (1 Corinthians 12-13). As humans, we will never fully understand God. We need to remind ourselves that all our speech about God is not the full truth. It is a partial truth. What we must strive for is to make our images as inclusive as we possibly can. Masculine images of father need to be balanced by feminine images of mother.

"...now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant."
—Isaiah 42:14b

"The fullest possible expression of the divine image is man and woman together."
—Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu

For many people the designation "father" connotes power, strength and authority. It is no accident that many people perceive of a God who is a stern judge, because for them that is what father has meant. But we also know that God is forgiving, compassionate, loving unconditionally—qualities that have more traditionally been associated with our mothers. I believe that if our images of God included mother and father, our understanding of God would be enriched.

Of course, the language of "mother" and "father" will not make God real to everyone. For the person who has been abused by her parents, new images and new metaphors may need to be found which communicate a gracious and loving God. The point is that we try not to limit our understanding of God with the use of one image to the exclusion of others.

Finally, I think we need to embrace the feminine, as well as the masculine, reality of God because we need to demonstrate emphatically that the church welcomes men and women equally, and that it is committed to seeing men and women develop to their full God-given potential.

For a growing number of women—and men—the concept of a masculine God is a stumbling block. As Mary Daly has put it, "If God is a father ruling his people, then it is the nature of things and according to divine plan...that society be male-dominated." In other words, if God—the Supreme Being—is a man, then certainly man is valued over woman. And then certainly the church supports a social system in which men assume authority and domination over women.

Of course, it is not only our image of God the Father which presents such a stumbling block. Women are also excluded in references to Christians as brothers in Christ and sons of God, and they are closed out of many avenues of service in the church. But all these things are interrelated. As a friend once said after attending a Sunday morning service: "The congregation prayed to God the Father, listened to a man preach about the brotherhood of Christ, and sang 'Rise up, O Men of God'. I felt like I didn't belong."

There has, from time to time, been discussion about how the Mennonite name represents a barrier to persons outside the German-Swiss traditions, because it has become primarily an ethnic description. I would argue that in much the same way our masculine language about God, as well as our male-dominated church structures, are barriers to women's full identification with the church.

Feminine imagery and feminine language may seem strange and may make us uncomfortable. Some of you may feel much like I felt the first time I saw a picture of an Oriental Jesus. After all, Jesus was supposed to have brown hair and blue eyes, like he did in my Sunday school book. With time, I have come to see that an Oriental Jesus is every bit as valid as my Caucasian Jesus. We all visualize Christ in ways that speak to us.

It is the same with feminine imagery about God. It is good to be able to imagine God in ways that are meaningful to us, as long as our own particular images do not become our idols, as long as we do not close ourselves to other images and metaphors.

I believe that our acknowledgement of the feminine reality of God can liberate us—both women and men. It can also lead us to new depths in our knowledge of and communion with God.■

Esther Epp-Tiessen presented this paper to the MCC Canada board in September 1987. She is a member of that board, as well as of the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. Esther lives in Kitchener, Ontario with her husband, Dan, and their two young sons. They formerly served in the Philippines with MCC.

by Linea Reimer Geiser

Mother Hen

God, You are warmth
You are Mother Hen fluffing her feathers
spreading security around me
I am tee-heeing yellow fluff ball
letting You rule the world

Let all creatures, great and small
move back to their Source of Being
hear our Mother's cluck
live within the sound of it
help the bruised to find shelter
the weak to leap high
the maimed to dance in the circle
as our Mother calls the tune

Linea Reimer Geiser is a poet who lives in Goshen, Ind.



"Changing our worship language to be inclusive of women is difficult. Some congregations have discovered that not many issues have been as divisive nor evoked such strong emotional responses."

by Bev Suderman

Vignettes

Scene 1: I sit in an upper-level university class. The course is women's history and the professor is lecturing on the role of Christianity in women's subjugation. She mentions Paul, of course, the Old Testament, and then in a casual, throwaway tone of voice refers to Jesus' comparison of the coming kingdom as like a woman in labor (John 16:21). I am taken aback—in three years of theological training at a Mennonite college, never had this been mentioned.

Scene 2: I sit, with two female friends, all of us graduates of the same Mennonite Bible college, and we chat with a professor of that institution. At that point, I was bound for nursing, one of the others for social work and the third for law.

Why, our professor friend queried, were none of us headed for further theological training or for the ministry? We were all very capable, intelligent and thinking women, he said, and the Mennonite church needed us in leadership positions.

The three of us looked at each other, and at him, astonished. During our combined total of eight years at that institution not one of our professors (male, all of them) had ever hinted to us that we might consider continuing in theology. And more importantly, our college—with no women on the theological faculty, no attention to inclusive language in daily chapels or classroom lectures and with very little attention to female theologians of the feminist theology movement—had never explicitly or implicitly given any women any encouragement. When we rather passionately outlined this to him, he was taken aback by the intensity of our feelings and somewhat reluctantly conceded that we might have a point.

Scene 3: It's late evening and I am in my new apartment, having just settled into both a new province and a new job as a youth worker/assistant to the pastor in a Mennonite congregation. I am the first woman in that position. The phone rings and the caller is an older woman. Am I the new pastor at the church, she asks. I reply in the affirmative. Well, what do I think I'm doing there—women in the pulpit! It was unheard of, and sinful too. She refuses to identify herself and hangs up, leaving me very shaken.

These three vignettes, among many others, have shaped my understanding, my images of God. My history professor opened my eyes to a Jesus who used the images of my gender—childbirth, child-rearing. The Bible college professor/friend reinforced my conviction that for many Christian men (and Mennonite institutions) inclusion of feminine imagery for God was simply not an issue. And then the anonymous caller: God, and anyone representing that God in a religious setting, had to be male. Any other suggestion was so impossible as to be threatening.

All three of these encounters angered me: Why did I have to wait until university, until after an undergraduate degree in theology from a Mennonite institution, to hear from an Anglican history professor that Jesus used strong feminine imagery? Why was my Bible college unable to see and admit that it was a sexist institution? And why have our churches so indoctrinated their members into seeing God as male, forever and ever, amen?

I went through a time when God was "she," when I used "Mother" to describe God, when "brothers" were exiled and "sisters" were in. It was a meaningful stage. I began to feel closer to this supreme deity which before had had only male appellations and images. And I confess I relished the shocked faces of family and friends when I casually dropped the female pronoun in reference to God. But more than this, I really liked feeling that this God was somehow, in some way, connected to me as a woman.

Today, as an assistant pastor in a small-town, traditional Mennonite congregation, I don't lead congregational prayer using feminine images or pronouns for God. People here just aren't ready for that. I'm at a different point anyway. I feel good about using God-language which is applicable to either sex—Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer are my favorites. And I never, well rarely, use the male pronoun in reference to God. For somewhere in the last few years, God has become androgynous. That is to say, my images for God are both male and female and at the same time they are neither male nor female.

I remain uncomfortable hearing a prayer addressed only to "Our Heavenly Father" and which uses only male images and pronouns. I remain an advocate of recognizing the femaleness of God. I am committed to the use of inclusive language in our congregations. And I am slowly understanding the God-likeness of each of us, female or male. It's a struggle and an adventure.■

Bev Suderman serves as assistant to the pastor and youth worker at the Vineland (Ontario) United Mennonite Church. Though the youth of her congregation variously call her "Suderwoman" or "Superwoman," she's not planning on changing her name.

"We were taught that the devil is black, and God is white. The missionaries brought pictures like that and that is how they told us to draw them."



We think that God is not white, black, yellow or any one color. And God is not male or female. No person should claim God as an ethnic idol or say God is more like them than like some other person.

by Rich Meyer

Praying to God-black

One evening several staff couples from the school where we were teaching came over to our house. We had a wide-ranging discussion, and a number of things I heard have deeply affected me.

One of our guests asked, "How do you draw pictures of God?" First we said that we do not draw pictures of God very often. Well, if you would, how would God look? Or when you were little, did you have pictures of God sometimes? We admitted that our earliest pictures or mental images of God were probably of an old man, white haired, up over a cloud. We looked through the children's books we had, and we were glad to find one fairly new book that portrayed Jesus and the disciples as Palestinians, dark skinned with curly black hair.

The next question caught us off guard, "How do you draw the devil?" There we didn't have much to go on. The only depictions we could remember of the devil were in caricature or cartoons, in jest.

"We were taught that the devil is black, and God is white. The missionaries brought pictures like that and that is how they told us to draw them," one of the guests said. The others all nodded in agreement. "Do you think God is white and the devil is black?"

No, of course we do not think so. We think that God is not white, black, yellow or any one color. And God is not male or female. No person should claim God as an ethnic idol or say God is more like them than like some other person. We wanted to be clear on this point. We spoke with assurance.

Later I thought more about that. When I pray, when I talk to God and try to open myself to hear God speaking to me, what image of God do I have in my mind? If I am asked directly, if I stop to think about it, then I know that God is not a man, God is not white. But who do I pray to? Who is the God that I ask for forgiveness, direction, help or peace? What is that God like?

I tried an experiment. I began to pray imagining God as a black. I had my first answer right there: it was different. Then I knew that I had always prayed to a white God. That wasn't all; the mouth of God-black was moving. My former image generally had his mouth closed. God-white was smiling, gentle and friendly, but God-black had things he wanted to say to me. I think God-black sometimes has different things to tell me, different concerns or viewpoints. I think God-black asks me different questions.

I am not suggesting that God has changed, but my openness may have. I continue to find that my conversation with God has more life when I consciously confront my image for God and change it. When I prayed to God-black, I still had a male image for God, as I generally did with God-white. Now sometimes I imagine God as a woman before I pray.

Try it. Pray to God-black, and see what God says to you. Pray to God-female and see if she hears you differently. No one image is right. God is greater than our images. But if we do not try different ways of drawing God, it probably does not mean we are beyond that. It probably means we are relying on the image we first learned, the white male. If our God is more than the idol of our culture (where "normal" means "white male"), then we need to let God be more than that to us.■

Rich Meyer, his wife Brenda, and their three children lived and worked with MCC in Lesotho from 1982 to 1987. They taught primary school, trained teachers and helped with adult literacy classes, agricultural and construction work.

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by Julia Esquivel

Indian Tapestry

When I go up to the HOUSE OF THE OLD WEAVER,
I watch in admiration
at what comes forth from her mind:
a thousand designs being created
and not a single model from which to copy
the marvelous cloth
with which she will dress
the companion of the True and Faithful One.

Men always ask me to give the name of the label,
to specify the maker of the design.
But the Weaver cannot be pinned down
by design,
nor patterns.
All of her weavings
are originals,
there are no repeated patterns.
Her mind is beyond
all foresight.
Her able hands do not accept
patterns nor models.
Whatever comes forth, comes forth,
but she who is will make it.

The colors of her threads
are firm:
blood,
sweat,
perseverance,
tears,
struggle,
and hope.
Colors that do not fade
with time.

The children of the children
of our children
will recognize the seal
of the Old Weaver.
Maybe then
it will receive a name.
But as a model,
it can never again
be repeated.

Each morning I have seen
how her fingers
choose the threads
one by one.
Her loom makes no noise
and men
give it no importance
None-the-less
the design
that emerges from Her Mind
hour after hour
will appear in the threads
of many colors,
in figures and symbols
which no one, ever again,
will be able to erase
or undo.

From *Threatened with Resurrection* by Julia Esquivel, an exiled Guatemalan poet. Copyright 1982. Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press. Used with permission.

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by Lydia Harder

Changing Our God-Talk: The Promise and the Pain

Changing our worship language to be inclusive of women is difficult. Some congregations have discovered that not many issues have been as divisive nor evoked such strong emotional responses. Inclusive language brings the promise of full acceptance of women within our faith communities and a new level of mutuality of relationships between men and women. However we cannot ignore the pain that comes when something as foundational as language is changed.

Mennonites have acknowledged the importance of the community context of their "God-talk" by emphasizing community dialogue and discussion in understanding biblical passages. Community discernment and accountability are seen as central to formulating our faith statements and confessions (1). However this also means that when a proposal to change language comes to a community, much more is involved than the changing of a few words here and there. Certain aspects of community life must also be reinterpreted and changed; the limitations as well as strengths of a faith community become evident.

Our community consciousness will be challenged in at least three aspects when we change our worship language to include all people:

1. Communal Tradition

Women are beginning to realize the importance of community history and tradition in orientating us to the task of biblical interpretation. Christian feminists are arguing that women were shut out of the interpreting community for most of Christian history. As Rosemary Reuther points out, by not allowing women to teach or preach, women have not only been excluded from "shaping and interpreting the tradition from their own experience, but the tradition has been shaped and interpreted against them (2).

A focus on inclusive language presents a clear challenge to faith communities to evaluate and test the communal tradition of their biblical interpretation. Have women's experiences of God been taken seriously? Is traditional understanding being tested by women's experiences today?

Any critical evaluation of communal tradition will be painful. But the promise comes when forgotten and marginalized persons begin to contribute a greater depth to the community faith. Neglected aspects of our relationship with God and each other will become evident as history is reconstructed to include women. (3)

2. Institutional Relationships

A network of power relationships in both church and society influences the process of scripture interpretation. Inclusive language presupposes a community where everyone is free to express their understandings of God and where everyone is responsible to help test one another's theological understandings. However, we are becoming increasingly aware that the discovery and sharing of truth can be hindered not only by misunderstanding, but also by systematic distortion caused by power relationships. Often these power relationships are only unconsciously sensed and rarely are they articulated or taken into account when we formulate our faith statements. Third World people are forcefully pointing out that theological discussion has been dominated by rich, white European and American men.

Communication between women and men is very basically affected by patriarchy's pervasive influence throughout both our society and church. All of us have participated in congregational meetings or conference sessions and noticed how women are reluctant to share their ideas and feelings even when officially free to do so. The freedom to share is dependent on whether or not women see themselves and their ideas as worthwhile and important.

The challenge of inclusive language includes the challenge to come to terms with patriarchy and its influence on community dialogue. Becoming sensitized to power relationships which inhibit free and mutual exchange of ideas in the congregation is painful. Being willing to let go of status and influence in order to empower others takes courage and grace.

However the promise is that as mutuality and cooperation develop, the gifts of each church member will be more fully realized and there will be growth in understanding God's will.

"...when our language changes, we expect society to change as well. Those who resist language change may intuit that cultural change is in the wind... They will hold the language line until enough cognitive dissonance causes them to change or until the language norms of society change as they did when the word 'Black' replaced the word 'Negro.'"
—Shannon Clarkson, linguistic specialist



"Devout Hindus may take the trouble to memorize the thousand names of God in Sanskrit, each name full of meaning and revealing some aspect of the divinity, and to recite these names lovingly in time of prayer. I propose that you now invent a thousand names for Jesus. Imitate the psalmist who is not satisfied with the usual names of God like Lord, Savior, King..."
—Anthony de Mello

3. Modes of God-talk

Paul Ricoeur, a philosopher and theologian who has focused his reflection on the importance of communal language, notes a lack of sensitivity to poetic and symbolic language in the church (4). Twentieth century language is scientific language which attempts to eradicate all ambiguity and misunderstanding. Metaphor and symbol are seen as mere emotional embellishment. We have focused more on language that explains and describes rather than language that inspires and manifests.

As churches begin to work with inclusive language they discover the poverty of much of our worship language. They are challenged to grapple not only with the best name for God and each other but also with the mode of discourse best suited for speaking about God. They begin to realize that the traditional doctrinal and historical-scientific language for God is inadequate. It is not surprising that feminists are stressing not only expository and creedal formulations of theology but also music, litany, art, poetry, story and dance. The richness of biblical language is restored as other forms of discourse—narrative, prophecy, law, proverb, prayer, wisdom sayings, story—are recognized anew. Paradox is recognized as valid to express the inexpressible. Thus images of God as Mother can stand beside images of God as Father; God as immanent complements God as transcendent.

Language cannot be changed simply and superficially. Changing our God-talk will affect our self-understanding as a faith community. This change will not happen without pain. But the potential of full inclusiveness in language and community for all of God's people includes a promise of healing and renewed life which will make the pain worthwhile. ■

(1.) This perspective is articulated in a number of contributions in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*. Edited by Willard Swartley. Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies. 1984. Note particularly the essays by Walter Klassen and J. Howard Yoder.

(2.) Rosemary Radford Ruether. "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation." In *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Edited by Letty M. Russell. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1985. p. 112.

(3.) Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza has begun this work in her book, *In Memory of Her*. New York: Crossroad. 1984.

(4.) Paul Ricoeur elaborates on this in a number of books and articles. Among the most helpful are: *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press. 1976; "Naming God", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* XXXIV, No. 4. Summer 1979.

by Donald R. Steelberg

Easing Into Inclusive Language

In the summer of 1981 I took a Clinical Pastoral Experience at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. There I met women chaplain interns who told me how excluded they felt from worship because of the exclusive use of male language and male concepts of God. I felt their pain.

Fortunately the chaplain supervisors modelled a different way of worship and I began to develop a new understanding of God. I learned in a new way that concepts of God are very important. If our God is too small, we have narrow ideas of what God can do or is concerned for in our world. If our God is a white male, the world of women and people of color will be denied their reflection in the Godhead.

Upon returning to my pastorate in Wadsworth, Ohio, I began to make the language of my sermons and of the worship service as inclusive as possible. I tried to avoid choosing hymns that made the worshipers all men. Where possible, the line of a hymn would be noted in the service order asking that the wording be inclusive. I found this a very frustrating task. In prayers I sought to use designations for God which were inclusive yet personal.

I did not engage the congregation in any discussion of these changes, and I do not know how conscious the congregation was of them. I did inquire after a period of time if anyone felt concern that I had not been referring to God as Father. No one admitted to realizing that I had not done so!

When I moved to Wichita, Kan., I also began to use inclusive Psalm texts regularly. Asking for inclusive language in hymns and changing the wording of the Psalms did stir some reaction. Some women and men expressed appreciation. Other women and men complained strongly that the use of inclusive language was divisive. One person

• News from the

Larger Movement

- *Nicaraguan women are now speaking out against women battering*, in the wake of a report that 44 percent of Nicaraguan men beat their wives or girlfriends regularly. The report, prepared by the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Nicaraguan Women's Association, includes several proposals for improving the legal system's capacity to deal with battered women.
- A creative Filipino chemist has developed a "wonder fuel" which she hopes will help decrease her country's dependence on dwindling supplies of firewood, according to the U.N. publication *Development Forum*. Maria Carlita Rex Doran has created *Siroca*, a disposable, canned cooking fuel based on grain alcohol and blended with coconut oil and other ingredients, all readily available. Two hundred grams

of the economical, non-toxic and smokeless fuel will burn continuously for two and a half hours.

- A summary report from "A National Consultation on Science and Technology: Its Impact on Women" sponsored by the All India Council of Christian Women is available from the National Council of Churches of India, Christian Council Lodge, Civil Lines, Nagpur, 440 001 MS, India.

- Feminists for Life of America has organized a *petition drive for an Inclusive Equal Rights Amendment*, in which the E.R.A. and the Human Life Amendment are combined. The amendment proposes both equality of rights regardless of gender and respect for the right of life of all human beings, including unborn offspring at every state of their biological development including fertilization.

said she felt my translation of the Psalms robbed her of a personal God. Another claimed that feminism and feminist ideas were becoming a constant focus of church life.

In part this sense of focus was due to feminist emphases also being lifted up by Sunday school teachers in discussions on sexuality and the family. I devoted one sermon during my first year there to feminism. Otherwise, I did not make any programmatic statements about the use of inclusive language.

The issue surfaced at the 1986 annual congregational meeting when a member requested that a proposed constitutional amendment be written in inclusive language. This was rejected, and comments suggested there was an unspoken issue to be resolved. The church council later set up a committee to look at the constitution's language.

To encourage dialogue on the issue, I preached a sermon on inclusive language and God-talk. I gave examples of how language has changed over the centuries and is still changing. The discussion that followed was open, accepting and also very intense. Strong feelings on both sides were expressed. Some persons were very much opposed to changing what an author has written. Some said they find it difficult to remember the change in a hymn's wording when it is printed in the service order. One person suggested going through the hymnal and changing all the words we wanted changed, but in pencil. Some very explicitly stated they did not want these changes or further reference to the subject.

At present I am letting the subject rest while still using inclusive language in the Psalms and avoiding exclusive hymns or verses. I believe the issue is an important one and one that I hope to continue to work at in ways that will be helpful to spiritual growth.■

Donald R. Steelburg is pastor of Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church in Wichita, Kan. He serves on the MCC board and on the MCC U.S. Executive Committee.

by Florine Plenert

A Matter of Action, Not Semantics

In the day when God created man He made him in the likeness of God...He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man..."
(Genesis 5:1-2, RSV, emphasis added)

Recently our congregation has discussed "inclusive language" a great deal. The focus has been on masculine nouns and pronouns in the Bible and in our hymns. To many of us the interpretation is clear—*man* meaning *mankind*, and masculine pronouns are grammatically correct in such cases. However, some women in our churches find these references offensive and exclusive.

Our congregation has worked for many years to grant women equal status with men, as evidenced by the fact we have a female associate pastor. Women are well represented on all our church committees and boards, including the board of deacons and the board of trustees. So, when in 1985 our new pastor expressed his concern about sexist language and references in our hymns, we were reminded that until everyone feels welcome and included in every aspect of our church life, our task is not complete.

Since then, however, this matter seems to have become a major issue and is in fact becoming more divisive than healing. Notes in the bulletin or announcements from the pulpit to omit a verse or to substitute words in various stanzas of the hymns have been confusing and ineffective. I personally find these instructions distracting. I find myself searching verse three of the next hymn to see what offensive language prompted its omission (in so doing I have missed a portion of the service), or trying desperately to remember to substitute "people" for "man" and "they" for "he" in verse two (losing completely the hymn's message). Worship seems to have taken second place to language.

Paraphrasing Bible passages can give a refreshing new meaning to a very familiar passage. However, when done

• Women in the Church

• Amidst a swirl of controversy, **Nancy Hastings Sehested** became the first woman pastor in the 71-year history of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn. and the first woman to pastor a Southern Baptist Church in Tennessee. Sehested's Nov. 1 installation led the Shelby County Baptist Association to expel Prescott Church. In 1984, the denomination had passed a

resolution opposing women pastors.

A man disrupted the installation service saying, "This female Jezebel is going to lead you to hell. All you Southern Baptists are going to hell." At a press conference Sehested said, "Prescott, in calling me, has made visible the strong feeling of call many women have. We are not issues. We are people with a strong sense of calling. This is a discouraging time to be a Southern Baptist..."

• In March, the first women will be ordained as pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

• The General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists has created 88 new positions on conference committees so as to be able to appoint women to all of them. The action helps fulfill a 1985 mandate to provide wider opportunities to women in all areas not requiring ordination.

• Women are now permitted to preach in Mennonite congregations in Germany, according to a recent decision by the Association of Elders, Preachers and Deacons of the Union of Mennonite Churches in Germany. The association said the decision, based on Genesis 1:27 and Jesus' message, was a natural outgrowth of changing concepts of women's role in the church over a period of years.

for the purpose of pointing out the sexism of the language, I find it less acceptable.

I am sure some women welcome these changes and feel more included. For those of us who have sung these hymns for many years and memorized Bible passages as they were translated, there is no doubt that God's love includes everyone—male and female. The message is clear even though the language is less than perfect.

Language and culture have always been limiting factors for the hymn writers and Bible translators and unless we understand the times, language and culture, we cannot properly understand what has been written. The parable of the lost coin, if taken literally today, would have very little meaning for us who place little value on pennies. How many of us have been shepherds or are even familiar with a shepherd's life? But when we understand the people to whom Jesus was speaking and the culture of that region, the lesson of the lost sheep and the references to the Lord as Shepherd can be very relevant for us today.

Times change, cultures change, words and meanings change. I have no doubt that future hymn writers and translators will make a conscious effort to choose inclusive words. I am confident that God is calling men and women to write new hymns reflecting our language and culture. I feel the time for these new hymns and translations is here. But until these are available, I am sure that God will guide us to an understanding of God's message, if we don't get sidetracked by the language's limitations.

The real problem, it seems to me, and the underlying cause of many of these feelings, is that women still face many inequities in our society. The pain and hurt felt at work is brought to church on Sunday. I believe our congregation has become more conscious of and more sensitive to each other's feelings through our discussions on inclusive language. We must continue to grow in this area. But if the problem is deeper than language, we must also become active in our communities to help bring about the equal status of men and women as exemplified by Jesus' association with all people.

It is a matter of action, not merely semantics. When our actions and dealings with one another are fair, our words will no longer be the major focus. Our actions will speak louder than our pronouns.■

Florine Plenert is a school teacher living in Wichita, Kan. She is a member of the Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church.

by Carol Dyck

Capturing God's Mystery in Song

It is a songwriter's rather unique experience to be continually putting words into other peoples' mouths. Imagine my recent experience of listening for six rehearsal-hours a week to a group of 50 people repeating over and over again my thoughts, and my imagined sounds, until my language had become part of their language. I admit to this unusual form of influence with some reluctance since I am by nature one who expresses, rather than a crusader.

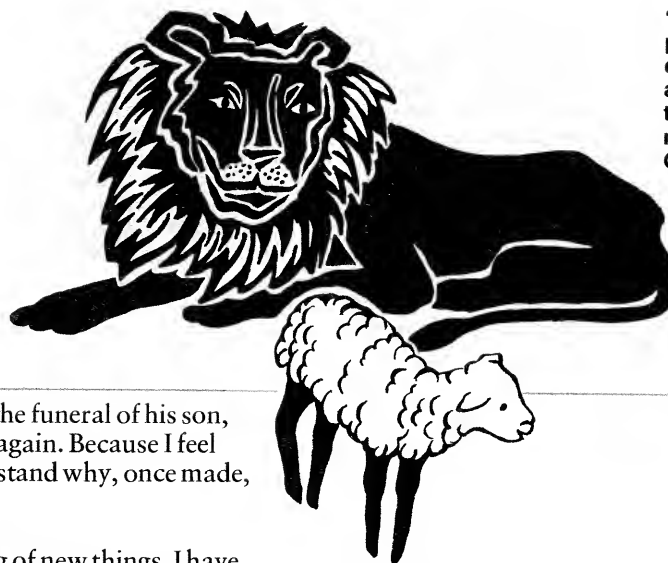
When I hear my words being drilled into peoples' minds, I am left with one prayer—"Oh God, please let this be the truth that I have told!" Too often in church we sing what we would never say. I increasingly realize that discerning and telling the truth is no simple task. It is a process to be agonized over.

One small, seemingly undeniable truth that I have felt the need to express is that women exist, and they always have. Simple as it may seem, this truth is not readily apparent in the church's song-language. As musicians we do what we can to correct this, by substituting "children" for "sons", by changing a few of the "brothers" to "sisters" (since "sibling" is unfortunately cold). We may sometimes even change a "He" to "She."

But we have so few inclusively neutral terms that aren't depersonalizing, and the problem is really bigger than that, because a song is more than words. Changing a song is very difficult, for a song is a thought inextricably embedded in the profound emotional force that is music, a force which calls forth a response of its own. It is also a ceremonial element with powerful associations to the most moving events of our lives. This makes a song incredibly resistant to change.

I used to insist that we try singing "Children of the Heavenly Mother" instead of "Father" in that lovely Swedish hymn full of female imagery. But recently I sang

"God could be characterized as the God of war as well as the God of peace, the God who never changes and the God who repents. They sang praises to God as the stable rock of our salvation as well as extolled the dynamic vitality of God as a spring of living water. Jesus was both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb that was slain."



"Making God's voice audible presents an interesting challenge. If you choose to have a baritone singing down from the balcony, you are saying much about your concept of God."

that song together with my friend at the funeral of his son, and I know I will never tinker with it again. Because I feel so keenly the power of songs, I understand why, once made, they are so hard to change.

But anything is possible in the making of new things. I have written and set to music an adventure story from the life of an elderly woman in our congregation. When we performed that work at the Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France, there was a Brazilian woman in the audience who had also been part of that same adventure. She could scarcely believe that a part of her own life's experience was being depicted in an art form. Such story-telling is exciting and fairly easy to do.

In other works I have tried to blow the dust off of the evidence of a female presence in God's story. This is much more difficult. The debilitating effects of sex-stereotyping have made us reticent to identify any role or perspective as uniquely female. No one wants their individuality ignored. But without any terms to describe "woman" as distinct from "man" how can I identify the woman in God? She will remain invisible. This had been a fundamental question for me.

I have come to accept the idea that women throughout history have tended to see the world in distinctive ways, and that human society has been like a one-winged bird in flight, imbalanced, disoriented, because women's perspective has been consistently downplayed and devalued. What I want to do is to shine an affirming light on some basic values that I associate with women's thought.

I would like to share with you how I worked this out in a specific work's text. (The music is another story.) Recently I was commissioned to write a choral work for the 25th anniversary of Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church in Edmonton, Alberta. The result was a cantata entitled *Worship Service* for choir, solo voices, trumpets, cello and flute. It is a sermon based on Isaiah 58. I consciously tried to include female elements on three levels—in the themes, in God's speaking voice and in the images used to describe God.

The cantata begins by speaking about church symbols and what they represent. While the arrogant congregation quibbles, "Should we die to self by sprinkling or immersion?" God accuses them of being far from death to self while they enlarge and protect themselves by exploiting the weak and killing the "enemy." In saying that true worship is only possible for those who humbly respect the lives and care for the needs of others, Isaiah and I are

supporting women in their traditional involvement in the material, physical realm. It is no surprise that women's rising influence in the church has coincided with a growing realization that Christian love includes a yearning for here-and-now justice.

To Isaiah's theme that worship is behavioral at its roots, I have added a second idea. It is warm and wonderful when, supported and legitimized by right behavior, worship involves emotions, too. In my experience, women have something to teach men about accepting and articulating feelings.

Making God's voice audible presents an interesting challenge. If you choose to have a baritone singing down from the balcony, you are saying much about your concept of God. It seemed critical to me to choose exactly the right sound to represent God's voice.

First, I decided that God's voice would not come from a separate place, but would emerge from the midst of the choir. We speak with the voice of God to each other in our communities as we struggle together to define the godly life.

Secondly, I decided that God's voice would consist of three elements together, a kind of trinity. There would be a male element, a female element, and a purely instrumental element beyond words. In Isaiah 58, God's voice sounds in two distinctly different tones. There is the stern, uncompromising angry voice, as God calls down judgement on those who see only their own need and desire to be holy, who don't see the pain and need of God's other children around them. Then there is the softer wooing voice of God, promising forgiveness and many wonderful things to those who will take their eyes off of themselves and learn to love. To work against a rigid sex-stereotyping of attributes, I allowed the female voice to predominate in God's first solo, the song of judgement. Later, the male voice with a female chorus accompaniment sings God's warmer gentler song.

The cantata ends with a love song, sung by two believers, a man and a woman, separately and together. They address their love song to the God whose three-toned voice has been heard throughout. This is the song:

• Opportunities/Resources

• "Every Woman in Ministry" is the theme of a *Women in Ministry Seminar* being held Nov. 18-19, 1988 at Sunnyslope Mennonite Church in Phoenix, Ariz. Pastor Marilyn Miller of Boulder, Colo. will serve as guest speaker. For further information, contact Mona Mann, 828 E. Brown Street, Phoenix, Ariz. 85020.

• The Women's Research and Education Institute, a non-profit organization, offers fellowships to train women in public policy formation. A fellow works 30 hours per week in a U.S. congressional office as a legislative aide on policy issues affecting women. The program is open to any student in a graduate program in the United States. For further information, contact Alison Dineen, WREI, 1700 18th St. N.W., Suite 400,

Washington, D.C. 20009; phone (202) 328-7070.

• The eighth international conference of the *Evangelical Women's Caucus* will be held July 21-24 at North Park College and Theological Seminary in Chicago, Ill. For information, contact EWCI, Box 209, Hadley, N.Y. 12835; (518)696-2406.

• The second art print in the "Mennonite Women in Service" series is now available from MCC. It depicts MCCer Brenda Meyer returning with two of her neighbors from a day of threshing sorghum in Lesotho. The artist, Judy Hall of Molalla, Ore., donated 475 limited edition prints of the watercolor to MCC. They can be purchased for \$30 each (plus \$5 postage and handling) from MCC, Box M, Akron, Pa. 17501.

Adoration

How beautiful the eyes of She who weeps for her children
Come unto me!
The cold one, the frailest
She lifts to her warm breast
And his mouth is filled with sweetness.
My God, how bountiful!
My God, how beautiful is She.

The wind, the wonder-full wind, whispering secrets
Past our knowing.
And the light, the earliest light
Whose colors I only begin to see on the farthest horizon
Of my wildest fantasy.
This is my God, my Mystery
Inexplicable as "Who shall be as one"

How lovely His word.
How powerful when spoken.
Thy rebuke has broken my heart!
He has named me here with the oppressors
And called me from the way of death
Into His paths of righteousness,
Into His paths of peace.
My God, how merciful!
My God, how beautiful is He.

In this song I have imaged God, in accordance with the voice, as female, as male and as "other." Having earlier defied stereotypical expectations, I chose here to go with tradition, and describe the woman in God as the nurturing mother.

I did so for several reasons. It is one of the few female images of God actually articulated in scripture. And it is a role that more women throughout history could identify with than any other, and my intent is to lend dignity and a sense of worth to people playing that role. To complete the picture, I also described God in terms traditionally considered male, as a word-user and a merciful judge. In addition, I have used several biblical images of God not related to sex. God is wind and light. Above all God is mystery, the mystery of "Two shall be as one". Somewhere in the distance I hear Paul saying "In Christ there is no male and female...". In God the nurturer and the judge are one, and such unity is beautiful!■

Carol Dyck is a singer, composer, teacher and graduate student living in Edmonton, Alberta. She is active in music at the Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church.

We encourage and invite letters from readers that speak to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in Report. Although we try to print all letters, some may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, although writers may request to have their names withheld.

Letters

- According to scholarly studies, abuse is a learned process that is passed from generation to generation. I wonder what happened in Europe to start the abusive patterns in the Mennonite Church? Many will probably consider me a heretic, but I see the Mennonite Church as a whole as an institution rampant with abuse and denial. I can't recall ever getting to know a Mennonite who wasn't abusive—or abused—to some degree or another—mostly to a very large degree.

I was quite surprised to see your Sept.-Oct. 1987 issue dealing with wife abuse. It's about time someone in the church acknowledges its existence. However, some types of abuses were not mentioned. For example, from my own experiences I have learned that I simply cannot do business with a "loving" Mennonite because I will get stabbed in the back every time. In the last two decades I have lost thousands of dollars I could not afford to lose to Mennonites who practice "financial abuse."

I also would like to see reports on the "abuse of silence and shunning." The silence, lack of response and open support, and being deliberately shunned has caused so many emotional problems in my life that it has only been with the help of a perceptive, objective non-Mennonite therapist that I have been able to define and learn to deal with them.

Also, I think "abuse by intimidation" is another form that ought to be studied. Mennonites seem to have an always present "superiority attitude" that leaves an "outsider" feeling inadequate. For example, a couple of years ago I transacted business with several Mennonites and in every instance, even though it was not relevant to our transaction, their letters' opening sentence smugly proclaimed, "I'm a Mennonite." Do Jews, blacks and other subcultural ethnic/religious groups do that?

- "Women of Strength," a slide set and video, has been produced by Dorothy Yoder Nyce and a group of seven women with overseas experience. Funded by grants from WMSC, the June Schwartzentruber Fund and various congregations and individuals, it focuses on women's economic contribution and situation in the developing world, with photos from India, Egypt, Uganda, Zaire, Transkei and Guatemala.

Copies are available for the cost of postage only to church, schools, women's groups, church agencies and conferences. Contact Sisters & Brothers, 125 E. Lincoln Ave., Goshen, Ind. 46526 or the Office of Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec, 131 Erb St. W., Waterloo, Ontario N2L 1T7.

- Goshen (Ind.) College is seeking candidates for the following positions: instructor of speech and broadcasting, instructor of English with TESOL specialty, and resident hall director. For more information, contact Willard Martin, Academic Dean, Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. 46526.

- *Woman Prayer, Woman Song: Resources for Ritual* is a new book by Miriam Therese Winter, noted songwriter of such titles as "Joy is Like the Rain." Bible stories and church history are retold through women's eyes, and feminine biblical images of God are used. It is published by Meyer Stone Books of Oak Park, Ill.

I recently had dinner with a small group of Mennonites and I nearly choked on my meal to learn that nothing has changed since I left the Mennonite Church about 20 years ago. One of the guests made a point to brag that a particular food had been "made by the Mennonites in such and such a community," as though no similar product could be equal if not made by "good Mennonites."

Another example of "abuse by intimidation" was a recent conversation I had with a Mennonite woman who was desperately trying to woo me back to the church. She was aware of the extreme financial plight I have been in over the past several years. I asked if she could help direct some future business my way and she replied the usual pap Mennonite reply, "Oh no, I know a Mennonite who does that and I will help them." (The following Sunday she probably put money in the offering to "help the poor.")

Two decades ago I left the Mennonite church because I could no longer endure the pain of abuse. As I look back, I am so grateful that I had the courage to leave, for freeing my life of the rampant abuse has literally saved my sanity, now that I understand what abuse does to destroy a victim's life. I know I will never live long enough to see the church healed of this rampant abuse, so I'll just say my piece when called upon, and watch in sad amazement as they continue to destroy each other physically, financially, emotionally and mentally. When a family becomes dysfunctional enough, generation after generation, it dies. Is that what is going to happen to the Mennonite church?

—Rosalea Hostetler, Kansas City, Mo.

News and Verbs

- The Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries has selected Charlotte H. Glick of Goshen, Ind. as its new president for the 1987-89 biennium. Patricia Hershberger of Woodburn, Ore. is the board's new secretary.
- The Rudy-Ruth Foundation of North Philadelphia provides grants for educational programs for urban children and youth. Named after Emma Rudy and Alma Ruth, too long-term evangelists who worked closely with Diamond Street Mennonite Church and who were highly respected in their community, the foundation recently converted a former funeral home on Diamond Street into an educational child care program for infants and toddlers of single working parents. The program will be operated by Bethany Child Care Center, whose executive director is Margaret Allen.
- Carolyn Holderread Heggen has received a Fulbright Fellowship to do research in India this summer for a book chapter entitled, "Women, Family and Social Change in India." She is also writing a doctoral dissertation entitled *Authority/Submission Role Beliefs and Self-Concept in Christian Women*. A member of Sandia Brethren in Christ and Mennonite Church in Albuquerque, N.M., she was recently appointed to the Overseas Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions.
- Ingrid Rogers, pastor of Akron (Ind.) Church of the Brethren and co-author with Yvonne Dilling of *In Search of Refuge*, is currently working on a book on Brethren and Mennonite women pastors. She is interested in hearing from active pastors but particularly from those who have felt called to ministry but have chosen not to become pastors and from those who have served as pastors for awhile but then left the ministry. Women interested in contributing should write to Ingrid at 211 Grandview Court, N. Manchester, Ind. 46962.
- Malinda Nikkel of Newton, Kan. was elected to the board of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, Calif. last August. She succeeded Marie Wiens, who was the first woman on that board.
- Marv and Ardith Frey are job-sharing the overseas service administrative position in MCC Canada formerly held by Stu Clark. The Freys have served with MCC in Swaziland, Somalia and Lesotho.
- Mary Burkholder has accepted a call to serve as pastor of Valleyview Mennonite Church in London, Ontario. She is a recent graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.
- Lorraine Sheeler was installed as minister of Christian education at Bayshore Mennonite Church in Sarasota, Fla. in September. She previously was a school teacher in Lancaster, Pa.
- Jane Gingerich won the 1987 Abner Martin Scholarship award in music. She is a second-year student majoring in trombone at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario. She is a member of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

- The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns is looking for a replacement for Joan Gerig of Chicago, Ill., who has served on the committee since 1984. The three-year position is open to a General Conference woman from the United States. We are particularly interested in a woman who currently lives in

the Midwest or who has ties to that area. For more information or to express interest, contact Emily Will, MCC, Box M, Akron, Pa. 17501.



Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

- Melanie Zuercher, MCCer in Harlan, Ky., has edited a collection of stories by a 98-year-old literacy student. *The Blind Mule and Other Stories* will be used by adults throughout eastern Kentucky who are learning to read. Melanie is also documenting unjust land ownership laws in eastern Kentucky.
- The interdenominational Hymnal Committee has decided to use traditional hymns and prayers in their original or standard form while incorporating a solid number of contemporary hymns "which will move people toward broadening their metaphors of God." The committee, composed of the Mennonite Church, General Conference Mennonite Church, Church of the Brethren, and Churches of God, felt this approach would best speak to worshipers representing a broad spectrum of needs. Having started out several years ago with a revisionist mindset, the committee concluded that "it is best to allow authors to speak from their own time."
- Becky Schenck of Eugene, Ore. was elected a member-at-large to the U.S. Peace Section at its November meeting in Wauseon, Ohio. Joan Gerig of Chicago, Ill. continues to represent the Committee on Women's Concerns on the section.
- Mary Yoder Holsopple, former MCCer and current student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Ind., is conducting research on stress among MCCers. Mary experienced firsthand the stresses of isolation, culture shock and war during her three years in Uganda from 1982-85. She hopes her data will be useful to MCC Personnel Services in providing adequate support services.
- Music by Carol Ann Weaver and poetry by Judith Miller combine in a new music-drama, "Timbrel in Her Hand." The poetic portrayal of several Old Testament women, written for the Feb. 22-27 Festival of Women in the Arts at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, features singing, speech, dance and instrumental music. Weaver is a professor of music at Conrad Grebel College and Miller is an English professor at Renison College, both part of the University of Waterloo.
- Irene Loewen has resigned as assistant professor of pastoral counseling at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminaries in Fresno, Calif. as of June. She plans to devote herself to her growing private counseling practice and to spend more time with her family. Irene, a clinical psychologist and member of the Committee on Women's Concerns, is the first woman professor at the seminary.
- Former MCC Zaire worker Denise Feil helped develop a nutrition booklet which will be printed in both French and Kituba. With photos and simple explanations, it teaches basic nutrition in clear terms. Denise hopes to begin a three-year graduate program this June called Child Health Care Associate at the Denver (Colo.) Health Sciences Center.

REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

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